

State Representative
3rd District

ALEX WOOD



Spring 2004

Committees & Appointments:

Commerce & Labor (vice chair)
Technology, Telecommunications
& Energy
Transportation
Legislative Transportation Committee
State Gambling Commission

**2004: Jobs,
Education,
Health Care**

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

What a session! As always, I went to Olympia in January with some clear goals:

- To serve the people of the 3rd legislative district;
- To help create jobs and improve working conditions in Spokane, in eastern Washington, and throughout the state;
- To keep education reform moving forward; and
- To do what I could to make quality health care more affordable and more accessible for all.

Looking back on our 60-day session, I see some gratifying victories, some disappointments, and some issues where those two combine.

We made some good progress in K-12 and higher education. We brought children's health-insurance premiums down for some of our state's hardest-hit families. We fought — successfully — against the usual batch of anti-working family measures from the far-right side of the aisle.

Of course, as most people recognize when they aren't blinded by ideology, it's clearly possible to be pro-working family AND pro-business — at the same time. We proved that again this year with some good measures to help get businesses up and running in Washington state, and to encourage our homegrown businesses to stay put and provide jobs. We also landed better than \$30 million for the WSU Riverpoint campus, which will be good for jobs and small business prospects, as well as for the students who want to obtain a first-class education here at home.

Throughout the session, we wrestled with choosing a new type of primary election system to replace the old open primary that has repeatedly been ruled unconstitutional. (To avoid devoting this entire newsletter to the primary story — it's a long one, but an important one, and it's still evolving — I invite anyone who wants more information about the issue to call my Spokane office at (509) 625-5354 or visit my website (<http://hdc.leg.wa.gov/members/wood/>).

I hope this session summary proves informative and valuable to you, and as always, please stay in touch during the coming months with your comments, advice, questions and criticisms. It's a real privilege to be your state representative.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Alex Wood".

Alex

P.S. For the results of the issues questionnaire that my seatmate, Rep. Timm Ormsby, and I sent out at the beginning of the session, please refer to the full story in Timm's current newsletter, or visit my website at the URL listed above. Thanks to everyone who took the time to respond. Your input is more valuable than you can imagine.

Rep. Alex Wood
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Snapshots: Olympia 2004

Education –

This was a good year for our students, at every level. We're still lagging on pay for teachers and classified school employees, not to mention community college instructors, but even without significant resources we were able to accomplish some things that had gone undone in the past few years.

- **WASL Reform:** We firmed up graduation requirements for the class of 2008 and fine-tuned the testing procedures to make them more fair and effective.
- **Expanded Levy Fund Base/Levy Equalization:** Changes in these two areas will give local schools an extra \$40 million next year, WITHOUT imposing new tax increases on property owners. We'll receive about 10 percent of this total, or \$4 million, here in Spokane County.
- **Learning Assistance Program:** Urban school districts like ours often face special challenges, and LAP funding has assisted schools in raising student achievement. Problem was, once grades improved, the money was yanked because the school was no longer struggling. We did away with this Catch-22, so our schools can be rewarded, not punished, for succeeding.
- **More Enrollment Slots at Colleges and Universities:** We were able to allocate \$10 million in the supplemental operating budget to fund 3,000 additional enrollment slots in higher-education institutions throughout the state. Also, we will spend \$7 million next year to allow more students to enroll in high-demand fields like nursing, computer science and bio-tech.
- **Promise Scholarships:** Enrollment slots without the money to pay tuition don't mean much, so we upped funding for Washington Promise Scholarships by \$4.3 million.
- **WSU Spokane Riverpoint:** One of the most significant victories for our city and our region is the \$31.6 million that we were able to obtain for construction of the new library, classroom and office building at WSU's Riverpoint campus. The governor's budget had called for only about \$6 million this year, with the rest to come later, but the 3rd-district legislative delegation convinced him and the Legislature to fund the entire project at once.

Health Care –

We addressed health care on several fronts this session. We made some steps in the right direction, and we ran into some roadblocks put up by folks who seem to care more about milking the problem than really coming up with answers. I think the good news is worth talking about.

- **Healthy Kids:** One reason I voted against last year's budget is that it slapped Medicaid premiums on Washington families who could least afford them. As many as 20,000 children were in danger of losing their health care if the premiums had taken effect this year, as they were scheduled to do. We pushed back

successfully this year, eliminating premiums for families with incomes up to 150 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.

- **Hospital Funding:** This year's budget gives local hospitals nearly \$20 million in new funding so they can continue to serve patients with no medical coverage.
- **Home Health Care:** There are quite a few people in Olympia who know the cost of everything, but the value of nothing. That's why it took us a year longer than it should have to honor a collective bargaining agreement with the state's home health-care workers union that gives these valuable service professionals a modest 50-cent per hour pay raise, and gives them health and workers' compensation benefits for the first time ever. The upshot, besides honoring the work that these people do, is that our seniors and other vulnerable relatives and neighbors can continue to live with dignity in their own homes, despite their health conditions.

Jobs –

The opportunity to hold a family-wage job is a fundamental right. In addition to the home health-care workers' agreement that I mentioned under Health Care, my fellow House Democrats and I made some positive strides this session.

- **Protecting the Minimum Wage:** My colleagues and I were successful again this year in defeating Senate efforts to gut the fair minimum-wage initiative that Washington voters passed in 1998 by a 2-to-1 margin.
- **Protecting Workers' Compensation:** Workers' comp is one of the backbones of a good job climate, but the system itself was being endangered by fraudulent claims and especially by overpayments being made to medical professionals. Both chambers of the Legislature unanimously passed a measure that will begin to correct these problems and keep the system strong for injured workers who need help.
- **Incentives for Business to Grow and Create Jobs:** Carefully targeted incentives that really do attract new businesses and motivate existing businesses to increase their workforces can be useful. The Legislature passed a number of these measures this session, and I voted for those that I was convinced had the best chances of creating family-wage jobs for workers in cities and rural areas throughout the state.

Keeping in Touch

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Rep. Alex Wood • 3rd District

